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ABSTRACT

This questionnaire study examined elementary school student's knowledge of a number of gender norms as well as some moral and social norms. Participating in the study were 111 first, third, and fifth graders, the majority of whom were white, with a small number of Hispanic and Asian children. The gender roles related to children's play, hair length, occupations, and clothing. Moral norms included stealing money versus asking for it and pinching versus saying hello when meeting someone. Social norms included eating ice cream with fingers versus a spoon. The children's beliefs about the possibility of violating these norms and their attitudes about other children who violated them were also measured. Findings indicated that children displayed strong knowledge of the norms, although older children had somewhat greater knowledge of the gender norms. Beliefs about whether it was possible to violate the norms increased with age. There were few age differences in the evaluation of norm violations, but moral norm violations were seen as the most serious, followed by social, and least serious were gender role violations. There were notable differences in evaluations of various gender norms. (KB)

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First, Third, and Fifth Grade Children's Attitudes About Gender Norm Violations

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Abstract

This study examined first, third, and fifth grade children's knowledge of a number of gender norms as well as some moral and social norms. The children's beliefs about the possibility of violating these norms and their attitudes about other children who violated them were also measured. The children displayed strong knowledge of the norms, although older children had somewhat greater knowledge of the gender norms. Beliefs about whether it was possible to violate the norms increased with age. There were few age differences in the evaluation of norm violations, but moral norm violations were seen as most serious, followed by social, and least serious were violations of gender norm violations. There were notable differences in evaluations of various gender norms.

First, Third, and Fifth Grade Children's Attitudes About Gender Norm Violations

Researchers have asked children what they know about gender norms (e.g., who typically plays with trucks or wears dresses), as well as whether they think it is possible or desirable to violate such norms. Often, knowledge and beliefs about gender norms have been compared to other social or moral norms.

Some research has found gender norm violations to be evaluated similarly to violations of other social norms (Damon, 1977; Carter & Patterson, 1982; Carter & McCloskey, 1983-1984), some to the more serious category of moral norms (Stoddart & Turiel, 1985), and still other research has found them to be evaluated as less serious than either social or moral norm violations (Smetana 1986). Levy, Taylor, and Gelman (1995) concluded that boys' violations were similar to moral violations, while girls' violations were similar to less serious violations of social norms. However, differing evaluations of the gender norm violations of boys and girls have not always been found. Also, researchers have asked about a variety of different gender norms (e.g., clothing, toys, occupations) and have often compared quite different masculine and feminine norms (e.g., boys wearing lipstick to girls playing football).

We have being doing a series of studies devoted to clarifying the confusing findings in this area of research by examining multiple aspects of gender roles: toys, hairstyles, clothing, adult occupational and parenthood roles, childhood activities, and play styles. We have compared boys' and girls' norm violations in similar activities (e.g., girls with boys' hairstyles compared to boys with girls' hairstyles), and we have compared gender norms to some social and moral norms. This study examines these issues in a sample of elementary school children.

Method

Participants

The participants were 111 children (53 boys; 58 girls) in the first, third, and fifth grade. The children in the first grade (17 boys; 25 girls) were 6 and 7 year olds (age in years $M = 6.94$, $SD = .48$). The third graders (23 boys; 14 girls) were 8 and 9 (age $M = 8.91$, $SD = .32$, $N = 37$), and the fifth graders (13 boys; 19 girls) were 10 and 11 years old (age $M = 10.92$, $SD = .38$, $N = 32$). The majority of children were White, with a small number of Hispanic and Asian children.

Materials

The children were asked about 20 items concerning gender, moral, and social transgressions. The sixteen gender-role transgressions included: activities (2), toys (4), appearance (4), adult occupations (2), adult parental roles (2), and play styles (2). The female (8) and male items (8) were matched as closely as possible. Color pictures taken from a catalog were shown to the children for eight of the items. All 20 items may be seen in Table 1.

For each of the 20 items, the children answered three questions. The first question for each item investigated knowledge of gender stereotypes or social and moral norms. The second question for each item asked if a gender, moral, or social transgression was possible. The third question for each item investigated the children's attitudes about a transgression. The children were asked how much they would like being friends with a person who committed a moral, social, or gender-role transgression. These questions were scored with a 5-point Likert scale using "smiley" faces representing the five points of the scale from very positive to very negative.

Two different semi-randomized forms of the questionnaire were used, both containing the same 20 items. The items in the two forms were ordered randomly with the constraint that items

accompanied by a picture were organized at even intervals throughout the form. For each item, the knowledge question was asked first, next the flexibility question, and lastly the attitude question.

Procedure

Each child was tested individually by one of three White female experimenters. Prior to asking the questions the experimenter showed the child a card with the five "smiley" faces, representing the Likert scale. The children held the "smiley" face card and pointed at the face along with their verbal response throughout the session. If a picture accompanied the item, the subject was shown the picture before the knowledge question. The picture remained visible to the child throughout all four questions.

For the knowledge questions, the children were given two response choices (e.g., boys or girls). For the flexibility question they were given a choice of a "yes" or "no" response. For the attitude questions, the children were asked to both point at the smiley face card and to verbally respond.

Results

Knowledge about the Gender, Social, and Moral Norms

To examine the children's knowledge of these norms we used a 4 (domain: social, moral, masculine, feminine - repeated measures) X 3 (grade) X 2 (gender) ANOVA. The items were scored such that an item identified in the conventional or expected direction was give a score of 1.0, opposite of convention, 2.0, and neutral, 1.5. There was a significant interaction between grade and domain, $F(6,315) = 5.7, p < .001$. An examination of the separate domains showed an increase in conventional knowledge with age in the masculine (Grade 1 $M = 1.05$; Grade 3 $M =$

1.01; Grade 5 $M = 1.00$) and feminine (Grade 1 $M = 1.05$; Grade 3 $M = 1.00$; Grade 5 $M = 1.00$) domains, but not in the social or moral domains, which were answered in the conventional direction at all ages. Essentially, the means indicate that the children readily identified all of these items in the expected direction.

Is Norm Violation Possible?

For these responses, yes was coded 2 and no was coded 1. Scores above 1.5 therefore indicate that the children tended to say that norm violations were possible. These scores are presented in Table 2. The children believed all of these norm violations were possible (scores > 1.5) except boys becoming a mother and girls becoming a father, and boys wearing girls' clothing.

We compared the masculine and feminine violations (averaged across all items for each gender) compared to the average social and moral violations with a 4 (repeated measure, domain: social, moral, masculine, feminine) X 2 (gender) X 3 (grade) ANOVA. This analysis produced a significant main effect of grade, $F(2,105) = 32.32$, $p < .001$, and a significant Grade X Domain interaction, $F(6,315) = 9.51$, $p < .001$. Post-hoc tests indicated that the fifth grade children ($M = 1.91$) were more likely to say norm violations were possible than were the third grade children ($M = 1.83$), who, in turn, were more likely to do so than first grade children ($M = 1.60$). The interaction with domain reflected that these grade differences were larger in the social and moral domains than in the gender domains, although the basic trends were the same.

We also examined children's beliefs about the physically-based gender norm items, mother and father. We hypothesized that older children would think it less possible than younger children for boys to become mommies and girls to become daddies. These items were each

analyzed with a oneway ANOVA, both of which produced significant effects of grade, *F*s (2,108) = 3.61 and 4.72, $p < .05$. In direct conflict with the hypothesis, post-hoc tests indicated that the fifth grade children were the most flexible. That is, fifth graders were more likely to say boys could be mommies ($M = 1.23$) than were third or first graders (*M*s 1.03 and 1.07). They were also more likely to say girls could be daddies (*M*s 1.19, 1.03, 1.05 for grades 5, 3, and 1).

Evaluation of Norm Violators

The children were asked how much they would like being friends with a person who violated these norms. These items were scored with 5-point Likert scales with a higher score reflecting a more positive evaluation.

We first examined the relative evaluations of engaging in these norm violations. The evaluative ratings of the items can be found in Table 3. The most negatively evaluated behaviors were the moral, coughing on someone, a boy wearing girls' clothing, and the biologically-based gender roles (mommy and daddy). The most positively evaluated items were a girl becoming a doctor and a boy playing quietly. Several other gender norm violations of both boys and girls were viewed positively, typically involving toys, activities, and occupations.

We compared the children's evaluations of the average gender norm violations compared to the average social and moral norm violations with a 4 (repeated measure, domain: social, moral, masculine, feminine) X 2 (gender) X 3 (grade) ANOVA. This analysis produced a main effect of domain (social, moral, masculine, feminine), $F(3,315) = 265.62$, $p < .001$, and a main effect of the participants' gender, $F(1,105) = 11.01$, $p < .001$, an interaction between Gender and Domain, $F(3,315) = 6.36$, $p < .001$, and an interaction between Grade and Domain, $F(6,315) = 3.53$, $p < .005$.

The main effect of domain reflected more positive evaluations of girls adopting masculine norms ($M = 3.00$) than of boys adopting feminine norms ($M = 2.81$). Violations of gender norms were viewed more positively than violations of social norms ($M = 1.91$), which, in turn, were viewed more positively than violations of moral norms ($M = 1.18$). The evaluations of these domains are shown in Figure 1.

The main effect of gender reflected somewhat more positive evaluations of norm violations by girls. However, the interaction between gender and domain demonstrated that the more positive evaluations by girls held true only in the case of feminine (Boys' $M = 2.61$; Girls $M = 2.98$) and masculine (Boys' $M = 2.72$; Girls $M = 3.26$) norms, but not in the case of social or moral norms.

The interaction between grade and domain was related to the fifth graders ($M = 1.27$) having slightly more positive evaluations of violations of moral norms than either of the other age groups (*M*s 1.14 and 1.15, respectively). The social and gender norms were not evaluated differently by the different age groups.

We also made direct comparisons between the children's evaluations of matched gender role items (e.g., boys with girls' hairstyles as compared to girls with boys' hairstyles) with a series of repeated measures ANOVAS. These analyses involved eight pairs of items. In two cases (mommy/daddy, jumprope/football) the boys' and girls' norm violations were evaluated similarly. In the case of play styles, boys playing quietly and gently was evaluated more positively ($M = 4.13$) than girls playing loud and rough ($M = 2.74$), $F(1,105) = 62.13$, $p < .001$. In all other cases (hair, clothes, dolls, cars/kitchen, and occupations) the girls' norm violation was evaluated more positively than the boys' (all Fs > 23, all ps <.001). These comparisons can

be seen in Figure 2.

In summary, there was a substantial range in how these norm violations were evaluated by the children. Gender norm violations were evaluated more positively than social norm violations, which were in turn, evaluated more positively than violations of moral norms. Girls were more positive than were boys about gender norm violations. The children made clear distinctions among particular items, being most critical of moral and social norm violations, appearance violations, particularly those of boys, boys playing with Barbie dolls, girls playing loud and rough, and anyone wishing to become a parent of the other gender. The children were somewhat more negative about gender role violations of boys as compared to those of girls, but the difference was quite small ($M = 3.00$ as compared to 2.81).

Conclusions

- The first, third, and fifth grade children identified these norms in the expected direction, however the older children were more likely to identify the gender norms than were the younger children. The age effect, while significant, was very small. Essentially, all the children knew these norms.
- Older children were more likely to say that it was possible to violate most of these gender, moral, and social norms.
- When asked about a physically-based gender norm, becoming a parent of the other gender, most children thought this kind of norm violation was not possible. However, the oldest children were somewhat more likely to say it was possible, possibly because they were interpreting it in terms of the parenthood role rather than physical parenthood.
- When evaluating norm violators, the children were most negative about moral and social

norm violations, followed by the gender norm violations of boys, then those of girls. Age differences were not found in evaluations of norm violations.

- Comparing various gender norm violations, some of both gender were evaluated positively, and some negatively.

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Table 1

Questions Asked of the Children (Form A)[a]

1. Toy kitchen (accompanied by picture)
   a. Who usually plays with a toy kitchen: boys or girls?
   b. Can boys also play with a toy kitchen?
   c. How much would you like being friends with a boy who plays with a toy kitchen? (Scored with a 5-point Likert scale using smiley faces ranging from "I would really not like it", through "I would like it a lot.")

2. Eating with fingers[b]
   a. How do people eat ice cream: with a spoon or with their fingers?
   b. Can people also eat with their fingers?
   c. How much would you like being friends with someone who eats with their fingers?

The remaining questions were scored in the same manner as Questions 1 and 2.

3. Boy hair (accompanied by picture)
4. Nurse
5. Daddy
6. G. I. Joes (accompanied by picture)
7. Football
8. Boy clothes (accompanied by picture)
9. Stealing money (versus asking for it)[c]
10. Loud and rough play with jumping and yelling
11. Cars (accompanied by picture)
12. Coughing on another person (versus covering their mouth)[b]
13. Girl clothes (accompanied by picture)
14. Doctor
15. Quiet/gentle play
16. Girl hair (accompanied by picture)
17. Pinching (versus saying hello when meeting someone)[c]
18. Barbies (accompanied by picture)
19. Mommy
20. Jump rope

[a]An alternate form (Form B) with questions in a different order was also used.
[b]Social norm question
[c]Moral norm question

Table 2

Children's Judgments about the Possibility of Engaging in Gender-Role, Moral, and Social Norm Violations

Norm Violation	Rating[a]
Boy playing jumprope	2.00
Boy playing with kitchen	1.98
Girl playing with cars	1.97
Girl becoming doctor	1.96
Boy playing quietly	1.96
Girl playing rough	1.95
Girl playing with G.I. Joes	1.93
Boy becoming nurse	1.90
Boy playing with Barbies	1.89
Girl playing football	1.89
Girl having boys' hairstyle	1.86
Eating with fingers	1.83
Pinching someone	1.78
Boy having girls' hairstyle	1.76
Coughing on someone	1.73
Stealing money	1.72
Girl wearing boys' clothes	1.61
Boy wearing girls' clothes	1.38
Boy becoming mommy	1.10
Girl becoming daddy	1.08

[a]An answer of yes was coded "2", and an answer of no was coded "1", therefore scores above 1.5 tend to indicate that the children believed the norm violation to be possible.

Table 3

Children's Judgments about the Desirability of Engaging in Gender-Role, Moral, and Social Norm Violations

Norm Violation	Rating[a]
Girl becoming doctor	4.21
Boy playing quietly	4.13
Boy playing jumprope	3.89
Girl playing football	3.68
Girl playing with cars	3.64
Boy becoming nurse	3.59
Girl playing with G.I. Joes	3.11
Boy playing with kitchen	3.09
Girl having boys' hairstyle	2.81
Girl playing rough	2.74
Boy playing with Barbies	2.50
Eating with fingers	2.47
Boy having girls' hairstyle	2.18
Girl wearing boys' clothes	2.18
Girl becoming daddy	1.65
Boy becoming mommy	1.62
Boy wearing girls' clothes	1.47
Coughing on someone	1.34
Pinching someone	1.33
Stealing money	1.03

[a]These were scored on a 5-point scale with higher scores reflecting more positive evaluations .

Figure 1. Evaluations of Norm Violations

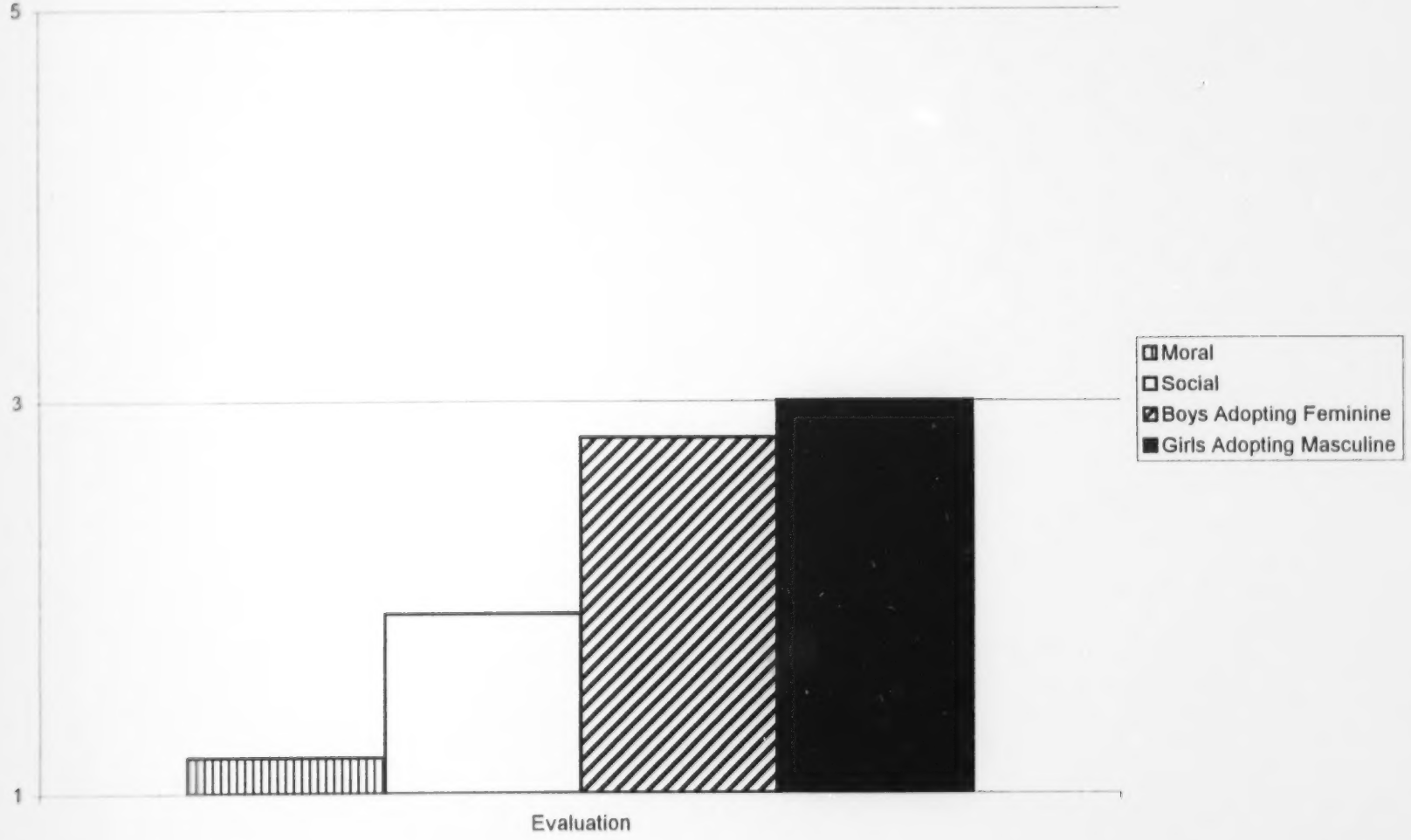

Figure 2. Evaluations of Gender Norm Violations of Boys and Girls